

Small Woodland Owners' Group

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March 2010

SWOG events

This is such an exciting time, with SWOG events happening all over the country! Any member can come along to any event – and we look forward to planning more in the near future. If you have an idea for a topic, a speaker or would like to have an 'open woodland' then please be in touch with me and we can plan it together.



Most meetings are free of charge, although we do occasionally ask for a small contribution for specific events.

A very big thank you to

Heather, Sean, Phil, Maurice, Chris, Shane, Michael, Stuart, Julian, Nick, Mike, Matthew, Ian, Ray, Steve, Dan, Jon, Margaret and so many more who are helping to plan our little gatherings!

Make money from your photos

Woodlands.co.uk are on the look out for photos of people involved in Family Forestry.

This month we are looking for photos of people enjoying their **wood while cooking with others or gathered around a fire**. Send photos to

margaret@woodlands.co.uk

£10 Amazon voucher for every photo used.

South East

Walk and talk

Tottington Woods
West Sussex
20th March 2010

Laughton, East Sussex
with Julian Evans and Steve

Wheatley
17th April 2010

Light, structure, habitat and
butterflies.

Woodstoves: 22nd May

"Using your wood
to heat your home"
Flimwell, E Sussex

Bats and moths

Northiam
12th June. An evening BBQ with a
moth trap and hopefully some
bats!

South West

**Anyone in the SW willing
to host a SWOG day?**

Small Woodland Owners' Group

One Saturday in February by Margaret Hanton

The owners of Combwell woods in Kent recently had a meeting on woodland archaeology. The whole meeting was facilitated and financed by the High Weald Partnership. They support owners to work more closely together, and do more "management", by which they mean coppicing, removing rhododendron, and actively encouraging the features, which make it a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Partnership had commissioned Dr Nicola Bannister, a professional archaeologist, to guide us.

We came to the meeting because we were curious about the history of our woods, and stayed all day to learn also about the historical evidence in our neighbours' woods, and about our neighbours!

Most of us were surprised to learn that the woods in medieval times were part of the Royal Manor of Wye, over twenty miles away. They used to bring great numbers of pigs annually to feed on the pannage (acorns) here. The pigs and their drovers made their slow way along what is probably a pre-historic routeway, still discernible through the back of what is now Bedgebury Pinetum. There must have been more oaks then, before the chestnut coppice was planted in the early nineteenth century.

We were treated to a power-point presentation of photographs, diagrams, and drawings, which showed very clearly how woods were used in the past. They deepened our understanding of saw-pits and charcoal platforms, and demonstrated the uses of woodbanks. It was particularly interesting to see that in medieval times, this large wood (Combwell) had been sub-divided amongst about twenty different owners, in much the same way as it is today, and along many of the same boundaries. (see map: <http://www.swog.org.uk/articles/combwell-wood-meeting-by-margaret/>)

In the afternoon we walked around a few of the woodlands in Combwell, and our professionals spotted some saw pits and charcoal platforms that had never been officially recorded. We were exhorted to take care when doing any forestry operations not to obliterate the evidence, but we were probably relieved to hear that these relics are not (yet) protected by statute. It was also an opportunity to learn what our neighbours are up to. One of the owners reported his success in removing a rhododendron root single-handed with a 400lb.winch. Another gave us the details of his website, where he offers bushcraft experience for school groups and children's parties. A third turned out to be a co-opted member of the Small Woods Association Board.

On our wanderings, we encountered a couple waving a sheet of A4 and looking lost. "Are you woodland owners?" we asked. "Not yet" they replied. As we guided them on their way, owners were keen to tell them they would fully recommend buying a small wood "My family agree, it's the best thing we ever did" said one. I was altogether very pleased, but then I would be, wouldn't I?

Events North

SWOG meeting

27th March 2010

The Woodsmith's workshop
Beamish Museum,
Co Durham

Only a few spaces left, email
Tracy if you would like to
come along

<http://www.woodsmithstore.co.uk/shop>

Cumbria Woodland courses

<http://www.swog.org.uk/news-events>

Woodlands.co.uk blogs

Bee keeping

Snow pictures

Logs, fires and stoves

www.woodlands.co.uk/blog

Scotland

Royal Highland Show

24- 27th June

We hope to be there! Hope
you are too.

<http://www.woodfairs.co.uk/scotland/>

More information needed!
Please email Tracy with
events.

WoodlandsTV.co.uk

Woodland entrances

Woodfairs

Making plants with a

chainsaw

Thatching



Building a compost loo

A course in Dorset

The loo design is intentionally low-impact (no concrete, for example) and therefore extremely well suited for woodland use.

The course is intended to give participants a wider perspective on the various issues related to site, materials choices and upkeep in making the design, so that everyone will have the knowledge to tailor the experience to their own needs back home.

The photos are of a toilet designed and built by Malcolm at Ourganics, Pat Bowcock's place near Bridport. Ours will probably be smaller, but it does give an idea of what we will be doing.

April 16th - 18th and April 23rd - 25th (Fri - Sun)
£215 residential / £145 non-residential OR
£375 / £250 for both weekends!

This course is part of an exciting new comprehensive two-weekend series. It offers participants the start-to-finish knowledge and experience required to site, design and build a low-impact (no-concrete) compost toilet at home (or anywhere, really).

Section I (April 16th - 18th) focuses on Theory, Design and Practice.

What is a compost toilet and why is it so worth having? What factors are important in choosing the site and what design options should be considered?



Section II (April 23rd - 25th) focuses on Construction. What tools and materials are best suited to this kind of construction in this climate (and others)? Fundamental construction safety and proper tool usage reviewed and the building of the loo itself

led and overseen by our experienced instructor.

<http://www.monktonwyldcourt.co.uk/>



Central

Alvecote wood open days. Tamworth

Sarah and Stephen have lovely ancient semi-natural wood, which is not open to the public all the time, but they do have some open days.

Sundays 28th March, 25th April and 23rd May. The woods are open from 10am to 4pm. Parking is limited. There should be a good display of daffodils in March and of Bluebells in April. You can also see some of the coppicing work they've been doing over the winter. Further details are on www.alvecotewood.co.uk

East Anglia

Wood fuel fair

20th, 21st March,

Rockingham forest, Stamford

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/woodfuelfair>

Huntindonshire countryside services events

<http://www.swog.org.uk/events/hunting-donshire-countryside-events/>

Wales

BWW meeting

5th June near Llanddewi

Come and find out about Better Woodland for Wales Scheme. More details to come. Email Tracy if you are interested.

Woodland Skills Centre, Wales

www.woodlandskillscentre.co.uk

Security in woodlands by Sarah and Stephen

Most people have no trouble with security in their woodlands, but depending in your location and what you have stored there, security on woodland sites can be a problem. Threats come in the form of trespass, poaching, vandalism, theft (of wood, of tools and equipment, of trees), and fly-tipping. Most are a minor nuisance, but occasionally can be a setback for a woodland owner. Below are some ideas from Sarah and Stephen on improving security, although many woodland owners will only want to use a few of them.

At our own woodland site, we had a lot of problems with vandalism, theft and poaching when we first took ownership – indeed on the day the purchase was completed, we found somebody had broken in with a chainsaw and helped themselves to pieces from a fallen dead tree that we were preserving as wildlife habitat. We have had three attempts to break into our building – one before it was even finished, and therefore didn't have any security devices in place!



We have also suffered theft of trees from a newly-planted hedge, and there has been definite evidence of trespass, and of poaching. As security is our day job (we run a company that makes and sells security products for motorcycles, bicycles and other machinery), we hoped that we could share our experiences regarding woodland security with you.

It is worth remembering, however, that a determined and professional thief, who knows what you have, and what they want, will bring the right tools and are likely to defeat any security you have in place. What we have done is to try and make the site so unattractive that they give up.

Types of Security

Security measures you can take fall into three main categories:

- Physical – locks, chains, barriers. Keep them out and keep them from stealing valuable goods.
- Technical – alarms, surveillance cameras, web-cams.
- Personal/Community – by which I mean relationships with people who can help look out for the wood, and make it harder for people to do damage.

Physical Security

We have had to do a number of things to make the site less attractive to unwanted visitors. The first thing we had to do was build and install a better road entrance. We were concerned about travellers arriving in caravans and parking on the site. Vehicle access also makes it easier for people to steal equipment or large quantities of wood. A tractor can be stolen by a lorry with a mounted crane. Stop lorries getting in and you reduce the likelihood of that type of attack. We made a very sturdy sliding barrier, as well as a gate mounted behind it to keep foot visitors out. This barrier is probably the single most effective deterrent we have made. We were careful to maintain our ditch and add a mount adjacent to our new entrance. Both measures also help to prevent vehicle access.

We also had to put a very Colditz-like barbed-wire fence along the roadside. This has worked to some extent, although the determined still manage to climb over it, and it is gradually being concealed by a hedge planted in front to provide habitat as well as improve appearance. We have installed some dead hedging to plug gaps in the boundary with an adjacent field – not as good as barbed wire, although we hope brambles will grow over it, and make it so.

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We have also had to invent a locking device for the roller shutter door on our barn building - which led to people trying to get in by using tin snips on the side of the building. We have therefore riveted the sides of the building to make this harder to do. We have made security grilles to go over the skylights on our building and locking brackets to prevent the solar panels from disappearing. The building itself has steel cladding that is secured with anti-tamper screws – otherwise you could just unscrew a building panel to take a look inside!

Inside the building we have multiple anchor points in the concrete floor, to which we lock the tractor and attachments and a site box with massive chains (16mm link diameter hardened) and locks. Our ladders are also secured by chains to prevent people using them to get back out of the building after entering through the roof. A site box on its own can be stolen – a few blokes can lift it into a van - so we'd recommend locking it down with a chain and padlock to a ground or wall anchor. You really do need to lock down any motorized vehicles such as tractors, diggers, quad bikes and ATV's – removing the ignition key isn't enough, nor is leaving them in a locked building. A chain, ground anchor or wall anchor, and high quality chain and lock will make your vehicles much less attractive. The gate is locked with similar huge hardened chain, and when we are staying on site, we still lock it with the lock on the outside, so you can't tell if we are there by looking at the gate.

Whatever chains and locks you use, remember to ensure that the chain is:

- Guaranteed impossible to crop with bolt-croppers
- Resistant to freezing and sledgehammer attacks
- The chain and lock are mounted off the ground to resist sledgehammer attacks
- Matched by the security level of the lock to avoid leaving an obvious weak point
- Remember to chain or otherwise secure the hinge-end of gates – it is much easier to lift gates off the hinges than to break a good quality chain



Making your items look undesirable can also help: so although some of our tools look very tatty, they work well. We have resisted the temptation to re-spray them and make them look smart. The re-sale value of second-hand and well-used equipment is much lower than that of new items, so the thief will have less interest if it doesn't look smart.

Finally, we don't leave any desirable tools at the woods. You have to think what you would do if you lost the items you leave there – we only leave things we could do without, although reluctantly. You really do need to think what you really need to leave there, and then take everything else with you. Chainsaws, brush-cutters, generators, hedge-trimmers and so on are all highly attractive to thieves, so avoid leaving them at an unattended site.

Next month: Technical security

Sarah and Stephen <http://www.torc-anchors.com/>

Woodland Archaeology by David

8. Vegetation as an indicator of past use

In all the talk of ground archaeology I haven't made any mention of the trees and the ground flora. They provide important clues to past use and help to improve the picture you build up of the wood's history.

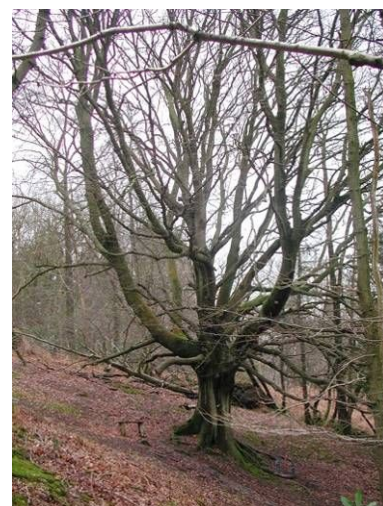
The way the trees have been managed, as well as the constituents of the ground flora can give you clues. The geology largely determines what grows best and although in the past the knowledge of the underlying geology was not as advanced as it is today, woodsmen knew what species would grow well in their local woodlands. In addition their tree management skills had been handed down from father to son and were in their blood.

Once a maiden has been cut and shoots have begun to develop from the stump, all future coppicing has a tendency to develop from the outside of the stems and the original stump in the centre rots away. This can leave you with a ring of living stems. This isn't always what happens, but you will find numerous examples where it has. A question I am often asked is the age of stools and it's rarely possible to say with any degree of accuracy. It would be great if you could because then learning about the wood's history would be so much easier. Unfortunately there are too many variables: the nutrients underground, the aspect of the slope, the degree of drainage, the geology, the local climate, the effects of browsing (by deer, for example), the time of year the coppicing is done and, of course, the species of tree. It takes a lot of experience to begin to even come close, so I'm afraid I won't be able to be very helpful on this.

But it can help in making a guess about the age of a coppice stool to know what the species may have been used for in the past. You can get a very good idea of what species was used for what craft by looking in a book I didn't have in my reading list – it's **Woodland Crafts in Britain** by H L Edlin. It was first published in 1949 by Batsford (but there have been more recent reprints) and manages to capture well the last days of many woodland crafts. Edlin describes the tools used and which species was used for what, it's very well illustrated and I use it frequently. Needless to say, the book is only available second hand and is now quite pricey.

My experience on the Weald of Sussex and Kent is that the start of a local industry (such as brickmaking and iron production) can be very influential in changing the species being coppiced. If you know what local industries have come and gone and roughly when, you can begin to put an approximate date on the age of stools and even guess what might have been growing there before the one you're looking at. You will also get clues from looking at what trees are in the boundary bank of the wood.

The owner of the wood generally sold the coppice standing in cants (an arbitrary measure of area) to woodworkers who would then cut it and either sell on the wood or use it themselves. The boundaries of cants were frequently marked by a coppice stool cut a few feet above the ground, a sort of low pollard.



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Coppicing and grazing animals do not mix. In general, you excluded animals from coppiced woods and did your best to protect the growing shoots from deer and rabbits as well. In wood pastures, trees were pollarded to prevent grazing young shoots. Oak pollards were quite common, but pollarded beech can be found as well. If you have one or two old pollards in your wood, it may be a sign that the wood was used as pasture.

Old trees were often used as markers, and a veteran beech or oak can often be found beside old trackways, or on woodbanks. Their significance varies depending on their position; working out the significance of a veteran tree can lead to many happy hours of discussion and argument. If you are at all botanically inclined, the ground flora will reveal much more about the history of the wood than almost anything else. Don't fall into the trap of thinking that because you have found one or two ancient woodland indicator species, you have an ancient woodland: you need a wider picture than that. A proper analysis of the flora using quadrats and the NVC (National Vegetation Classification) will give you a truer picture of what sort of woodland you have and how it fits into the local pattern of woods.

The vegetation in a wood is probably the reason you are interested in woodland, and you may feel I haven't done it justice here. But I'm quite certain that your enthusiasm means you will be self-motivated to pursue the subject further without any prompting from me.

David Brown , South East Woodland Archaeology Forum
<http://sewaf.org.uk/>

Next meeting 21st April 2010

Bedgebury. Speakers to be confirmed. All welcome, please email David if you would like to know more.
david@sewaf.org.uk

If you have enjoyed this article about woodland archaeology, you might like to read David's previous articles.

Part one – Introduction.

<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/the-ghost-of-workers-past-delving-into-the-history-hidden-in-your-woodland-part-1/>

Part two – Banks and Ditches

<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/the-ghost-of-workers-past-delving-into-the-history-hidden-in-your-woodland-part-2/>

Part three – Recording banks and ditches

<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/the-ghost-of-workers-past-pt-3-delving-into-the-history-hidden-in-your-woodland/>

Part four – Tracks and pathways

<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/the-ghost-of-workers-past-pt-4-delving-into-the-history-hidden-in-your-woodland/>

Part five – Saw pits

<http://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/woodland-activities/the-ghost-of-workers-past-pt-5-sawpits-delving-into-the-history-hidden-in-your-woodland/>

Corrected link from previous article: Exploring your woodlands book

[http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/exploring_your_woodlands_history.pdf/\\$FILE/exploring_your_woodlands_history.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/exploring_your_woodlands_history.pdf/$FILE/exploring_your_woodlands_history.pdf)

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I'm a Welsh Woodland owner (Get me out of here?)

By Shane Logan

Part 3

So we've now arrived at the FC Wales Management Plan stage. CRN numbers have been secured, a management planner selected from the FC list and you've both now had chance to decide on what operations you want to carry out in order to achieve your goals as set out in your plan.



At this point I must stress that accuracy is the key. If, for example, you put in for a 1235m road line with culverts and other SBVs (Site Based Variables) that is what you will be paid for and what must appear on the ground. No good twelve months down the line thinking "*I need 1500m of road line with a huge turning circle at its end.*" It may be too late, although the FC will allow some formal amendments, which will by necessity take time.

BWW does however allow you to make significant appropriate changes to your forest area. For example, you may have an area of uneconomic woodland (an awkward area of grand fir on a steep slope springs immediately to mind) which you wouldn't think of removing without extreme cost – unless you are an eccentric millionaire with a natural hatred of conifers – BWW may assist towards the costs of such an uneconomic operation and encourage the owner into more appropriate future management.

All these things and more are calculated using the Woodland Improvement Grant (WIG) calculator which is found on the FC Wales website. All prices are based on average current prices for both items and operations and reviewed on a regular basis. Go to <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/website/forestry.nsf/byunique/inf-d61cjm4> and have a play around!

Funding is available for everything from nest boxes to tracks, permissive access including car parks, vegetation control including rhododendron (hurrah!) to crop protection including deer and squirrel control. Depending on advice from your management planner you may need external specialist assessors who can help with preparing the plan in particular areas such as continuous cover forestry, woodland ecology, deer management, social forestry and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS).

Some of it may be seen as a bit of faff but remember it is all being driven by bureaucrats in Europe and in fairness the poor old FC Wales is simply trying to apply a common sense approach to a funding stream where common sense is sometimes in short supply! As someone who manages projects both within Rural Development Plan Axis 2 and Axis 3 funding I can safely say the Commission has actually made a decent fist of things considering the problems with current European funding.

So following on from Parts 1 and 2 of my missive I hope most of you agree (to some extent) that planning is a good thing. Play around with the WIG calculator and see for yourselves an indication of what you could achieve. Most forests have a problem area, and more than a few in Wales have a rhododendron control issue but are you seriously going to look for up to £12k/ha on your own to provide hand-cut and stump treat with a follow-up spray? Possibly not!

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Is BWW for everyone? Possibly not but consider for a moment how you want your legacy to be remembered? A shambles, managed, environmentally decent, uncared for, derelict? The choice is yours as the owner but I'm yet to see woodland that cannot be improved even if it's only a nest box.

Often I am asked to comment on forests and estates belonging to a range of charities, national bodies and private individuals; now as a lifelong forester many will know that we really are a bunch of the most nose buggers known to man (and woman) kind! We like nothing better than looking over fences at everything from harvesting to recreational maintenance and wondering how we would/could do things better! But the point here is not criticism but a fresh pair of eyes, we all get tired of seeing the same things day after day and so, if nothing else, BWW will bring a fresh pair of keen eyes to your woodland and see things in a new way that you as the owner may have overlooked through time and familiarity.

Thanks for taking the time to read this and hopefully it has inspired some of you to act to improve your woods in some way or other. A famous man once said 'we can not command nature except by obeying her' perhaps by utilising the Better Woodlands for Wales and FC we can help nature on her way.

If you have any questions about the scheme please feel free to contact me at x10shane@hotmail.com

Anyone from Forestry Commission England or Wales like to contribute for the next newsletter on your support and grants?

SWOG meetings coming up

Brancepeth, Brantingham (Edge of Yorkshire Wolds)
24th April
Speaker to be confirmed

Wales near Llanddewi
5th June 2010

Come and meet forester Shane Logon and talk about how BWW management could work in your woodland. Share ideas with other owners and enjoy the Welsh countryside.



Malvern, Worcestershire – with Phil Hopkinson
11th July 2010 – Tree ID, woodland management and a lovely walk!
<http://www.malverncoppicing.co.uk>

Essex

Date, speaker and topic to be confirmed.

Email Tracy if you are interested in coming along to any of these events, or have ideas for more!



Public Rights of Way (PRoW)

by Tracy Sutton

So who is responsible for Public Rights of Way?

Public rights of way (PRoW) are maintainable at public expense and the maintenance of the network is divided between statutory duties which are set out in the Highways Act 1980.

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/RevisedStatutes/Acts/ukpga/1980/cukpga_19800066_en_1



The County Council (as Highways Authority) is responsible for:

- Signposting routes leaving a metalled road
- Way marking along the route of a PRoW
- Ensure no intimidating or misleading signs deter the public from using a PRoW
- Consider the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to provide reasonable access
- Maintain the surface and clearing undergrowth from the surface (other than crops)
- Maintaining bridges and ditch crossings
- Securing the removal of obstructions
- Ensuring landowners comply with their responsibilities

A bit more on Highways Authorities responsibilities

Sign posting and way marking the route is important to users to give confidence that they are on the right route and important to landowners to make sure users are not trespassing on private land. It is usual practise that effort is made by the Highways Authority to seek permission from landowners to affix way marks to their property. If a landowner declines or there is no suitable place to affix the way mark then the Highway Authority may install way marker posts to indicate the route. Way marks and signposts must only be used on the definitive line of the path.

Bridges and ditch crossings will be installed and maintained suitable for the classification of the route. Your Highway Authority will have its own policy for negotiating the repair and maintenance of such structures where vehicular access is required by the landowner. The public can expect the Highways Authority to ensure PRoW defects are made good and if the issue cannot be resolved informally the Authority has the power to take immediate action itself and recover the costs or/and serve statutory notice to ensure that landowner responsibilities are observed. If this is not done then prosecution against the landowner can be bought; also the public may serve notice to the Highways Authority to ensure obstructions are removed and surfaces are maintained.

The Highway Authority can assist landowners in the maintenance of authorised limits (gaps, gates & stiles – discussed later) to the public's access and provide a minimum of 25% contribution towards these costs. For example Worcestershire County Council provides landowners, when eligible, with the materials required for installation including delivery.

Further information on the duties and powers of the Highways Authority can be found on the Institute for Public Rights of Way website by searching Duties and Powers.

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Landowners are responsible for:

- Maintaining gates, stiles and gaps to a safe standard (British Standard 2006:5678 – to be discussed later)
- Clearing encroaching overgrowth from the side or above; includes trees falling from land adjacent
- Keeping routes clear of crops
- Keeping routes free of obstructions and misleading signs
- Adhering to the legal requirements regarding bulls and other dangerous animals



A bit more on Landowner responsibilities

Obstructions come in all descriptions and the bottom line is any thing that makes a PRoW inconvenient or impassable at any time is an unlawful obstruction of the public's right of way: padlocked gates, crops, barbed wire, electric fences, dogs, log piles etc. The public have a right at common law to remove obstructions and to take a reasonable detour from of the definitive line to avoid obstructions.

Vegetation encroaching from the sides must be cut back so the line of the path may be apparent and convenient for its users. Bridleways need consideration in respect of the user's height and 3m of head room must be allowed. Crops other than hay or silage must be kept to clear specified width (footpaths: 1m cross field 1.5m field edge; bridleways 2m cross field 3m field edge) and the PRoW must be reinstated within 14 days of first disturbance; the surface must be convenient e.g. seed bed rolled and all field edge PRoW must never be cultivated. It is important all employees and contractors are aware of this when carrying out works to avoid unnecessarily obstructing or disturbing the PRoW. Under Agri-environment schemes landowners are required to meet all their legal obligations when claiming payments e.g. single payment scheme, forestry and woodland schemes.

This is simply a summary of responsibilities and more information can be found through your Council and various publications. For example Worcestershire's link

<http://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/cms/environment-and-planning/countryside/public-rights-of-way/maintenance-and-obstruction.aspx>

The publication "Managing public access" by Natural England which can be found on their web pages by searching the publications catalogue.

Coming up: Gaps, gates, styles and multi use land

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Waste Wood owners day – by Nicholas

Perhaps like many woodland owners, whilst I am in awe and gratitude at being able to own a woodland and want sensitively to use some of the resources this gift offers, I have been a bit non-plussed at where to start. I have wanted to take away some firewood, improve the wood's prospects of biodiversity and maybe dabble in a little woodland craft, but have not really known where to start. Added to this have been some prohibitions from the local council, which imposed a tree preservation order (now lapsed) and a vague sense



that if I cut down too many trees or the wrong kind of trees, I would have the Forestry Commission bearing down on me. I felt that the best thing to do was to see if I could talk with someone from the Commission face to face. I contacted our local officer John Stafford, and was delighted to find him amenable to a visit to my area, Waste Wood in Hadlow Down. I was conscious that the multiple ownership of woodland meant that it would be a better use of his time if he could visit several of us at the same time. I therefore contacted the other owners of woodland in Waste wood and asked if any of them would be interested in meeting with John. I was delighted to get a good response and so it was that around eight woodland owners met with John and his colleague Andrew Wright in the middle of December last year on what must have been the only day of sunshine in that rainy month!



John's initial suggestion had been that the best way to use the time would be if we looked at one wood all together and used that as a model for other people then to make their own plans in their respective woodlands. In the event we had a delightful walk almost through the whole length of Waste wood which is really quite diverse and everyone had the chance to ask the questions which were on their minds about their own piece of woodland. It was explained to us what quantities of wood we are allowed to cut each quarter, and when and how we would need to apply for a felling license. The

process of planning a coppicing programme was explained and many other questions were addressed. All in all we were delighted to find out how responsive the Forestry Commission are to the needs of small woodland owners and their openness to the possibility of working somehow outside the book e.g. by neighbouring woodland owners applying jointly for a felling license.

A lovely by-product of the day was the experience of spending time with the other woodland owners. People chipped in with their views about how to protect saplings from deer, how to make the woodland a good environment for butterflies and birds, etc. Clearly there was a lot of knowledge already among us. Inevitably, there was some difference of opinion and concern about how some of the woodland is being managed but this was outweighed by the sheer pleasure of meeting so many like-minded people and a feeling that we were part of a community who share many common goals. It began to feel like we were not each looking after a separate patch of woodland, but together managing a great forest. We all felt we wanted to meet again soon and we are as it happens now cooperating in an archaeological survey of the woods with Lyn Palmer from the Weald Forest Ridge Partnership Scheme, who is organising a fascinating aerial mapping project of the woodlands with a high tech process called LIDAR, which uses a plane to bounce lasers off the ground below and which can 'see' through the tree canopy. The data produced can be digitally modelled to produce three-dimensional images, revealing ancient routeways, ditches, pits, enclosures, mounds and banks. More on that from someone else though!

Seasonal change could threaten wildlife

Published in Global Change Biology, the study examines more than 25,000 such trends between 1976 and 2005, relating to 726 species. These species range from plankton to plants and from insects to mammals. More than 80 per cent of these trends show seasonal changes happening earlier. On average, events like the start of animals' breeding seasons are starting 11 days earlier than in 1976, and the trend seems to be accelerating.

Read the rest of this article here:

<http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/news/story.aspx?id=661>

How the butterfly got its spots

Heliconius butterflies have striking wing patterns, often with yellow and red spots and bands to warn predators that they are toxic. Some species are remarkably similar because it pays to mimic patterns and bank on each other's toxic reputation with birds.

Read the rest of the article here:

<http://planetearth.nerc.ac.uk/news/story.aspx?id=662>

Royal Forestry Society new courses

Thursday 6 May 2010

'Woodlands and their Management'

One-day introductory course on using the FC classroom at Wendover for the morning and the RFS Hockeridge Woods for the afternoon session. For further details contact Tring Office on 01442 822028; rfsHQ@rfs.org.uk.

27 May 2010

Introduction to Wildlife in Woodlands workshop

Based at the National Trust Centre at Ebworth - John Workman's old home - and nearby Buckholt Wood SSSI after lunch. That is offered jointly with the Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (IEEM). Further details are available through the IEEM at <http://www.ieem.net/20100527woodlandwildlife.asp>.

Aimed at beginners, we hope that both courses will help our many lay members appreciate how woodlands function and can be managed in sustainable multi-purpose ways.

Members asked for these pilots, so we trust will be well supported. Non-members are very welcome - and we hope that they will subsequently join the RFS. Please spread the word.

If the RFS pilots are successful, these will then be rolled out at other sites in the future. Let's support the RFS in these new courses - let SWOG know if you are going along, we would love to hear what you learn.

News from the woods

Malcolm has been building a small lodge.



You can read about it and see more pictures on our website.

<http://www.swog.org.uk/articles/what-malcolm-has-been-doing/>

Jillybean says:

I have hauled a caravan on to the land to use as a site hut. It's changed everything. Now my woodsman has somewhere to have a coffee that is warm and out of the rain. I can store some reference books, use my shave horse, and make beans on toast. My wheelchair bound friend can sit comfortably instead of sinking into the soft mud. I have arrived earlier and stayed later. I have been drawing, and watching with binoculars the Jays, Treecreepers, Pheasants, Tits Wrens and rabbits all feeding at or under the bird table. When outside, I've been too cold to sit still for long. Now I can have a walk and get wet, and not have to go straight home. just hope the night visitors don't wreck it though. The woodsman has cut an acre of 70 year old overgrown hornbeam coppice that has transformed the area, leaving just the Standards. Already the bluebells are appearing. The spring promises many great things for this now sunny corner.

Woodbodger has been busy:

The weather has been cold but fine here lately. I have cleared a large area of scrub goat willow of about an acre that borders a small river to create a glade area which I hope will encourage more bird life in particular Barn owls. Before any one gets excited this was originally a field but has just been left to go wild and no trees of any size were harmed. I have planted a couple of hundred of various willow cuttings at one end for basket making and in the rest I have huge mounds of scruffy branches that have to be cleared eventually when all tidied up this should create a quiet recreational area with some larger trees in it which will benefit from a little space around them.

facebook

www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=61487332523

The Small Woodland Owners Group (SWOG) is on facebook. You can also become a SWOG blog fan and receive feed from the site when new articles go up.

Dates coming up

Coppice conference in West Sussex

6th – 8th October